

Intellectual Disability: promoting daily living skills in adults

Mature adults who have not previously learnt daily living skills can, with appropriate supports, make significant steps towards independence. Age is no barrier to learning.

Adults living at home with parents

It has become common for adults (with and without intellectual disability) to continue living at home with their parents, who may continue to take responsibility for the household chores such as cleaning and preparing meals.



The sharing of household chores can lead to greater independence for your adult son or daughter and also reduces the burden on others in the household. It is important to provide opportunities for your son or daughter to practice and develop daily living skills, even when tasks take longer and require a certain amount of effort.

Intellectual disability and daily living skills

People with intellectual disability are more likely than their age related peers to need extra support to carry out everyday activities. It is important to have realistic expectations and consider what kind of support is most likely to help develop their independence.

While others may learn household tasks by watching their parents or carers, adults with intellectual disability may require more step by step methods to help them learn tasks.

Daily activities

The following is a list of activities that adults may be expected to carry out independently:

Helping around the house

- Load and start a washing machine, hang out the washing
- Fold a basket of washing
- Iron clothes
- Sweep, mop and/or vacuum the floor
- Cook a meal, wash the dishes

- Wash the car
- Mow the lawn.

In the community

- Catch public transport or take a taxi
- Handle money, use an Automatic Teller Machine (ATM), pay a bill
- Meet a friend for lunch
- Shop for clothes and groceries.

Teaching techniques

Variety

Use a number of different ways to teach tasks, if appropriate. The person may find it easier to learn a particular task if they:

- Join an independent living skills group/help out in local community groups
- Watch videos or DVDs
- Join in helping another family member with the task, or
- Have a photo sequence of the task with the steps written as a story or prompt.

Location

Teach the person the task in the place where the task will usually be done.

For example, if person is learning to iron their clothes, teach them how to iron in the room in which they will usually iron. This helps the person become familiar with the layout of the room, the places where items are kept, the way in which to prepare to begin ironing and how to pack everything away.

Step-by-step

Sometimes breaking a task into small steps and teaching one step at a time can make it easier for a person to learn the whole activity.

For example:

- Get the ironing board and iron
- Set up the ironing board
- Plug in the iron
- Iron a shirt
- Turn the iron off, set it aside to cool
- Fold up ironing board
- Put the ironing board away.

Backward Chaining

'Backward chaining' is a technique you can use to help a person learn a new skill. It means the person is taught the task in the reverse order. Take the person through the first steps of the task and begin teaching at the point where the last step begins.

For example, when teaching ironing, the first step for the person to learn would be: 'put the ironing board away'. The person then completes this final step. The process continues over time as you complete one less step and the person you are supporting does one more until they can do the whole task on their own.

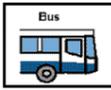
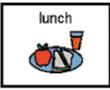
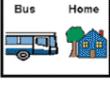
Backward chaining means the person receives instant success, which is likely to increase their motivation and confidence.

Schedules

Schedules are designed to bring routine and predictability to a person's day. A written schedule may help the person understand and remember planned activities. Using pictures of activities in the order in which they occur during the day is a great way to promote independence and help the person learn routines.

Practice

Regular practice is important to learn and maintain skills.

Morning	Afternoon
	
	
	
	

Tips for making the activity easier

Helpful Equipment and Techniques

Sometimes assistive devices, a change in the environment or different techniques can make it easier for a person to learn and complete a task.

A few ideas

- To make washing dishes easier, consider using a soft palm dish brush that moulds into the palm of the hand and has a built-in soap dispenser.
- Scourers and sponges may be easier for the person to hold if you buy the types with thicker handles and finger grooves.
- Leaving the dishes to air dry cuts down the number of steps in the overall task, reduces coordination demands and means there is less strain on muscles and joints.
- Some jobs can be done sitting down such as folding clothes, doing dishes, wiping the kitchen sink.
- Breaks and rest periods should be taken when needed. Household chores are often tiring.

Recommended resources on this subject include:

- *Safety in the Domestic Kitchen*: a video that covers safe working practices in the domestic kitchen by W Walker, N Barrett and S Clements. Bendigo.
- *Steps to Independence: teaching everyday skills to children with special needs* (4th ed) — a step-by-step guide to help parents teach essential life skills to the children with disabilities by BL Baker and AJ Brightman
- *Autism and PDD: Safety*: a book with many safety tips for everyday home activities by PB Reese and NC Challenger, 2002, East Moline, Illinois.

Websites

- **The Independent Living Centre** is a government service that provides free advice on equipment and techniques to help with everyday tasks. Contact them on 8266 5260 or via their website: www.sa.gov.au/disability/ilc
- **Child and Youth Health** website contains lots of advice on child development: www.cyh.com
- **Living With Adult Children** information sheet is provided by Child and Youth Health in the section “Parenting and Child Health” then Family and Relationships”.
<http://www.cyh.com/HealthTopics/HealthTopicDetails.aspx?p=114&np=99&id=1511>
- **‘Essential Lifestyle Planning’** is a guided process for learning how someone wants to live and for developing a plan to help make it happen:
http://www.learningcommunity.us/sample_plans.htm

